

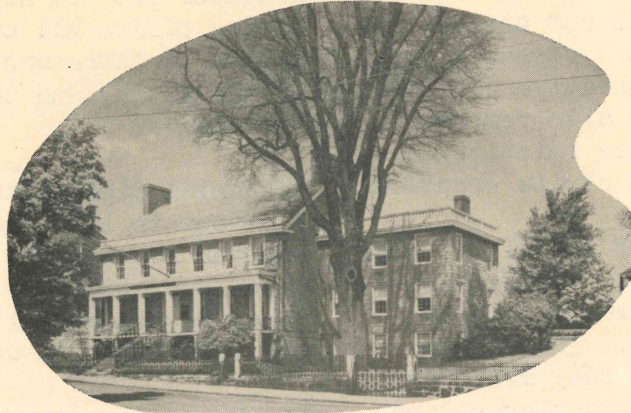
New London County Historical Society

11 Blinman Street

SHAW MANSION

New London, Conn.

Quarterly



Bulletin

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SHAW MANSION MARKS 200TH ANNIVERSARY

The Bank, the dead end street where Nathaniel Shaw built his house, followed closely the west bank of the river. Residents had a superb view of the harbor and Groton shores, as well as sandy beach and wharves literally at their doorsteps.

Nathaniel Shaw had been in New London only about eight years when he married Temperance Harris in 1730. He had sailed as master and owner of vessels, and had made enough money to leave the sea and set up as a merchant. There were eight children of his marriage.

Three sons were lost at sea in their twenties; Daniel left no children; Thomas did not marry; Nathaniel, jr. married a widow, Lucretia Harris Rogers, with a son who lived to be only seven. The two girls married, and Sarah had a son who died at the age of three. Mary was the only one who left children, her husband being the Reverend Ephraim Woodbridge. And so the Shaw name died with the first New London born generation.

Nathaniel, jr. was the one who made the name known to fame, and with whom the collections are chiefly connected.

Captain Shaw and his family moved to the site of the mansion in 1735, occupying

until 1756 a frame house on the lot he bought from George Denison of Westerly.

In 1755 the Acadians of Nova Scotia were torn from their homes and nearly six thousand of them were dropped in towns along the coast. In January 1756 a ship load of three hundred was landed here and the town had to find them a means of livelihood. Joshua Hempstead speaks of meeting with the Selectmen "to consider how to dispose of the French Neutrals". It was then that Captain Shaw came forward with a sort of eighteenth century WPA project. His house overlay a granite ledge, and he hired thirty-five of the displaced persons to quarry out the stone and build the house. The result was different from the standard New England house, but it was imposing and suitable to a family of wealth and position.

No indication of an architect or a master builder has turned up, but it seems likely there was some master mind over the workmen. Later changes have obscured the original house, but the plan is clear. A hall from front to back, but not in the central position, opens on the gardens. On a knoll is a gazebo, with a fine prospect of the town. The stairs in the house rise to a square hall from which the bedrooms open. The only room in the house which seems to have its old look is the Washington room, where the fireplace retains panelling. If pictures of the family were painted in this

house, much decorative woodwork was removed or plastered over when the house was re-done by the Perkins family in the 1840s. The pictures show engaged fluted pilasters at the corners of the rooms, which would have been in keeping with the style of the period. All but one of the old wooden fireplaces were replaced by marble mantels. Any decorative plaster work, if it existed, was also removed. Now the house bears little relation in its interior to the date of its erection.

The house was a center of social and business life as Captain Shaw and Nathaniel carried on their lucrative West India mercantile establishment. The ladies of the mansion were equally busy managing it, overseeing the domestic slaves, and entertaining the visitors who came.

As the events that led to the Revolution came on, the family was in even greater activity. The Captain was an old man, by the standards of his time, and Nathaniel ran the affairs, and was appointed to committees, to the Convention and in 1776 to the Committee of Correspondence. On the outbreak of war he was named Naval Agent for Congress and for Connecticut, which entailed providing ships, provisions, arms and money for the troops, and making arrangements for prisoners, ammunition and stores that came in on privateers, including his own. His care of sick seamen, both prisoners and colonials, resulted in the death of Mrs. Shaw, who contracted fever from some released prisoners taken into the house in 1781.

Washington and Commodore Esek Hopkins met at New London on April 9, 1776 and planned the first naval expedition under Congress. Washington stayed the night with the Shaws, and the room he occupied is kept as a memorial to him.

Washington was the most famous of the guests of the house, but there were many others of great stature. When Lafayette toured the United States in 1824, he stopped for a few hours, but by then both the Captain and Nathaniel were dead.

When Arnold burned New London, the mansion was about the southern boundary of destruction. Nathaniel was taking one of his few days of leisure and was fishing with friends off Montauk. They saw

the fleet and divined its intention, but it was too late to make shore, and they waited out the attack in Poquonnock Creek. Several small fires were set in the house, but on the heels of the departing army, a neighbor put out all but the one in the wooden office ell on the north end. Tradition is there was a quantity of vinegar in the attic, and this was used to subdue the flames.

Nathaniel died as the result of a hunting accident in 1782 and left the house to his brother Thomas, who in turn left it to his niece Lucretia Shaw Woodbridge Perkins. Their descendants lived in the house until 1907, when it was bought by the Society.

The house is enriched by furniture of the family, of which a few pieces have come home. Silver, china and books and the New London Garden Club's restoration of the gardens bridge the gap between the centuries. A fine small collection of letters to Shaw was kept when the bulk went to Yale. Manuscripts of Joshua Hempstead and Frances Manwaring Caulkins are possessions of which the Society can be proud. A vast quantity of material given by New London people contributes to our knowledge of old New London and its life.

(This material has been compiled from a number of sources, most of them based on family tradition. While the Mansion must remain a memorial to the Shaws, the Society endeavors to keep a proper balance with other families, and is eager to have more representative material from these.
L.P.L.)

NEW HAVEN TO BE MEETING PLACE OF LEAGUE ON SATURDAY FEBRUARY 4

The program for the meeting of the Connecticut League of Historical Societies on Saturday, February 4, promises much to anyone with the interest of his local society at heart. Devoted chiefly to manuscripts and their care, it is most timely for our local society with its mass of uncatalogued material. A question period and open discussion will follow the talks by members of the staff of Yale University Library.

All members of member societies are welcome at these quarterly meetings of the League. Coffee and dessert served by the host society supplement box lunches brought by those attending.

The New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, host for this meeting, has arranged special exhibitions for the League. For those who do not know this fine society it would be a good opportunity to inspect its collections. The registration for the meeting is at 10; the business meeting at 10.30; the first speaker at 11.15. The program ends at 2.30 to allow time for enjoying the exhibits. If you plan to attend, please notify Miss Clarke by February 1, so your name can be included in the coffee pot.

ANOTHER ORIGINAL LETTER
ADDED TO SHAW COLLECTION

Just before Christmas we were informed by our good friend, Miss Hazel Johnson, of the offer of a letter written to Nathaniel Shaw, Jr., by Eben Ledyard and dated New York 14th September 1781. This was eight days after the battle of Groton Heights. The subject of the letter is the exchange of prisoners. Mr. Shaw is addressed at Whitestone "on bord the flagg from N. London."

This letter was purchased from the New York dealer for the Society's collection, and it will be displayed on Washington's Birthday during our Open House celebration. Items like this lend excitement to the year.

A small book, "The American collector", published by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, has just come to hand. It contains four essays commemorating the Society's centennial observance of the appointment of Lyman C. Draper as first superintendent of the Society. In the Spring of 1844 young Draper completed the first of his extended trips through the old Southwest gathering and copying accounts of the pioneer generation of border-fighters and settlers. The essays in this book remind us of our debt to all who, like Draper, have sought and gathered and preserved the priceless manuscripts that now form the source material for our country's history.

Acting Custodians:
Mr. and Mrs. William L. Holmes

FIFTH GRADERS ON LAKE ERIE

We visited Cleveland for a week in January. You will remember that many early Connecticut residents received grants of "fire lands" here after the Revolution. The place we wanted most to see was the Western Reserve Historical Society. This fine society occupies two buildings, a library and a museum in a quiet residential neighborhood a few blocks from the University.

When we heard that 12,000 school children visited the Museum last year we asked when the next class was expected. When Mrs. Dawley, one of the curators, informed us that Fifth Grade pupils were expected the next morning, we asked to be allowed to join their tour.

We spent a fascinating and instructive time with the youngsters whose intelligence and deportment were on a high level. Flash cameras were used frequently as the young visitors passed the dioramic representations of early Cleveland and entered a log cabin where they were shown the home furnishings in use in the early 19th century. The curator in charge of the tour, Mrs. Bingham, made the early scene live again. The Museum devotes three floors to its displays.

By a stroke of good fortune we found Colton Storm, the director, with some free time, and we enjoyed an hour discussing problems of mutual interest. Mr. Storm informed us that the Cleveland Board of Education takes an active interest in the junior tours of the Museum, and even sends one of its members to participate in the programs. Transportation to the Museum is provided by school buses.

While in Cleveland we were hoisted to the observation room of the Terminal Building, 786 feet above Lake Erie, where we looked for the Lake, the Cuyahoga River, the Canal and the vast arteries of railroads spreading around the city. The falling snow blotted out the view of the Lake, and we will now have to wait for a clearer day.

For Your Information

The Society's telephone number is
Gibson 3-1209

The Mansion is open daily except
Sunday from 1 to 4.

Saturday, February 4. Connecticut League Meeting. New Haven. 10 a.m.
Wednesday, February 22. Open House at Shaw Mansion, 2 to 5 p.m.
Wednesday, March 29. New London County Imprint Group Meeting at Shaw Mansion, 3.30 p.m.

A SALUTE TO SOME GALLANT LADIES

The annual sale of greens and other Christmas things on December 15th filled the Mansion with the excitement that precedes the holiday. The ladies of the House and Grounds Committee fashioned many lovely things for the sale, and acted as hostesses for the coffee periods that punctuated the day. The Committee Chairman and her assisting ladies have won our everlasting regard for their efforts in the cause of the Pember Caulkins portrait. The sum they realized will be added to the fund that is to defray the cost of this masterly work by Ralph Earl. The fragrance of the greens and the good spirit that prevailed will linger always, we hope, as part of the atmosphere of the Mansion.

The small herb wreath that we were fortunate enough to get brought memories of a time in Canada when Indians came to the door with sweet grass baskets, and brought excitement to a small boy.

IN THE MARKET PLACE

We were interested to receive recently a letter from a New York art dealer enclosing a photograph. The picture was a portrait of a boy by an unknown American artist of about 1760. The asking price was \$3500.

From The New London County Historical Society, Shaw Mansion
11 Blinman Street
New London, Connecticut

Return Postage Guaranteed

The thanks of the Society goes to Dr. Frank E. Wilson for his generous and valuable gift of Volume 6 of the new American Heritage. These magnificent books, permanently bound, will be made available to those of the membership who may wish to consult them at the Mansion.

A word of thanks, too, to Mr. Herbert G. Huntley for the copies of "Antiques" which contain much solid information about the American scene.

Mr. Raymond J. Walker's continuing gifts of "Hobbies" and other items widen the Society's range of interests in a way that



ke its collections increasingly useful. To all these generous members we say, "Your gifts are appreciated, now and always!"

NEW PUBLICATIONS

The December issue of the Connecticut Antiquarian, the bulletin of the Antiquarian and Landmarks Society of Connecticut, contains articles by Williams Haynes, one of our members, and William L. Warren, a Vice-President and Promotional Chairman of the Connecticut League. Mr. Haynes writes on his favorite Connecticut subject, Major John Mason, and his article is a combination of biography and history. Mr. Warren's topic is Hartford's old Center Church and its architecture. There is, we are sure, much writing talent among the membership of the Society. If you have a hobby which you consider to be along the lines of the Society's interests---silver collecting, old firearms, picture framing, etc.---please tell us or write us about them.

Miss Hazel A. Johnson
146 Mohegan Ave.
New London, Conn.

